

# **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HIGH DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE ALBANIAN STATE TO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN (1922–2015)**



**Mal BERISHA**

## **ALBANIA'S HIGH DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN LODON**

Albania's diplomatic representation in London dates back to the year 1922, almost at the same time with the USA.

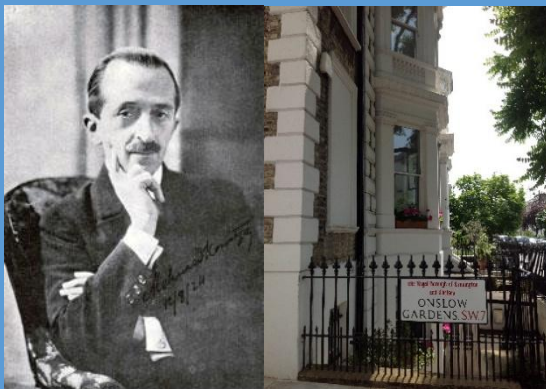
Here is a list of Albanian top diplomatic representatives in London from that year to date, which does not include the period 1945 - 1991.

As one may note below, these esteemed representatives of Albanian diplomacy were highly appreciated in the host countries and elsewhere in all forms and respects. The same applies to their own governments, albeit temporary problems and concerns.

The opposite occurred with Albania after 1944, when the communist regime not only neglected and ignored their contribution, but it went that far as to label them "traitors" "collaborators and enemies" only on political or religious grounds; even more worse, together with their families and relatives, they became subject to persecution, imprisonment and cruel inhuman treatment.

Fortunately, their radiating talent, devotion, dedication to their own country and their rich diplomatic and cultural heritage were restored back during the '90, with Albania's shift to democracy.

### **MEHMET KONICA (1922 – 1924)**



Mehmet Konica (1878-1948), Minister Plenipotentiary and a prominent political activist (1922–1924). A career diplomat, he has also served as Foreign Minister. He is the first albanian diplomat posted in Great Britain. Before that, he was member of the delegation of the Government of Vlora and its delegation to the Conference of Ambassadors in London (1913). They appointed him as Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Congress in Durrës, an office which he held also in the government emerging from the Congress of Lushnja ( 1920).

From 1920-1924 he served as Albania's top diplomatic representative in Great Britain. Thereafter, during 1925-1939 he served as political advisor to the Head of State.

Mehmet Konica ranks among the few eye-witnesses of the Albanian tragedy with borders. He followed it up from 1913 - 1923, when finally, an International Commission headed by the italian General Talini laid down the stones marking the Albanian - Greek borders. Unfortunately, General Telini did never return to Italy; he was assassinated by Greek armed gangs near the small albanian town of Delvina; his corpse accompaned on behalf of the Albanian Government by Mehmet Konica was sent to Rome with military honours. His death marked also the end of the border adventure, an adventure which ruled for a long time all the disagreements in the Balkans. A highlight in his diplomatic activity is his friendship with the the prominent British politician and Albania's friend, Aubrey Herbert. It was during an historic moment, when Albania was in dire need and in pursuit of a great ally as Great Britain, when together with the american Charles Telford Erickson, Konica proposed the royal crown to Herbert at a time when the kingdom was not yet born. Herbert accepted it, but to his bad luck, he passed away before that would occur.

Mehmet Konica remains a shining personality in Albania's history; he played an active and very useful role in each and every defining moment in Albania's historic turning points.

## ILIAZ BEJ VRIONI (1925 – 1926)



**Iliaz bej Vrioni** was born in Berat in 1882, as the son of Mehmet Ali Pashë Vrioni; he was an outstanding patriot, Vice Chairman of the famous “Prizreni League” ( 1878) and father of the talented translator Jusuf Vrioni; one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence together with Sami Bej Vrioni. During 1925 – 1926, he served as Minister Plenipotentiary in London with residence in Onslow Gardens, SW7. Descendent of a rich landlord family in Southern Albania, Iliaz Bej Vrioni was a radiating political personality. His father, Mehmet Ali Pashë Vrioni was on the side of Abdyl Frashëri during the Congress of Berlin ( 1878). Iliaz took part in the independence movement in Vlora in 1912 and was elected in its Senate. In 1914 he travelled to Germany with Esat Pasha to hand over the crown to Prince Guillaume de Wied. On 19 November 1920, while attending the Congress of Lushnja, as Chairman of the delegation representing Berati, he was elected Prime Minister, replacing Sulejman Delvina; he held that office until 19 October 1921 to turn back shortly, from 27 May -10 June 1924, when the so-called Democratic revolution led by Fan Noli broke out.

During 1925–1926 he served as Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris and in London. During February 1927 until January 1929 he was for a short time Minister of Justice. Likewise, he served as Foreign Minister during 1925–1927 and 1931–1933, maintaining close ties with Italy. In honour of his rich contribution to

international relations, in 1920 he was awarded by the French Republic with the high order “*Grand Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*”. He passed away in Paris, on 17 March 1932. In 1946, the dictatorial regime in Albania exhumated his remains and threw them into river Osumi in Berati. Thus, this prestigious personality of Albanian nation is tombless.

### **MALIQ LIBOHOVA (1926 – 1927)**



Maliq Libohova was Chargé d’Affairs in London during January 1926 - September 1927. He returned with the same capacity to that embassy during February- until June 1933. At that time, the Embassy was located at 118 Iverness Terrace, London. Only a “ stone’s throw away” today is the bust of our National Hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu - 113 Inverness Terrace, London W2 6JH; it was inaugurated there on 28 November 2012, the Centenary of Albania’s Independence.



## **EQREM BEJ VLORA (1927 – 1929)**



Eqrem Bej Libohova (1885–1964) served as Chargé d’Affairs in London from September 1927 until May 1929. He was an activist for the Albanian cause, diplomat, politician, writer and historian. He pursued the secondary and university studies in “Theresianum”, the Oriental Royal and Imperial Academy in Vienna, where he was trained on Balkan affairs. Afterwards, in 1904, he completed the doctoral studies on justice in Istanbul. During his trips to Middle East he came in contact with high contemporary personalities, as the British Feld-Marchal, Herbert Kitchener, the Chief of Staf of the Austrian - Hungarian Army, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf and the young major Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the future founder of modern Turkey.

In 1906, he was Third Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Orttoman Empire in Istanbul, then, in 1907, Third Secretary in Saint Petersburg and in 1909 Second Secretary in the Translation Office at the Foreign Ministry in Istanbul. Together with his friends he opened up the first ever patriotic club "*Bashkimi*" in Istanbul in 1908. He attended the Congress in Monastery in November 1908. He also took part in the proclamation of Independence and became its Senate Vice President. He has served as Foreign Seretary in the government of Prince Guillaume de Wied. During WWI in 1916, he was interned by the Italians in Cagliari. In 1924 he was elected in the Parliament.

King Zog sent him in London as Chargé d’Affairs in 1928. Then, he was posted in Athens. Eqrem Bej has the great merit of translating into german together with Baroness Marie Amelie,

Frein von Godin “ Kanuni i Lek Dukagjini” ( Kanun - Albanian Traditional Unwritten Law) and the 1200 - page monumental work “*Vështrim historik i kontributit për historinë e sundimit turk në Shqipëri*”<sup>1</sup>. He has left us a major literary heritage. He passed away in exile in 1964.

He was member of the German Academy of Sciences; the latter has awarded him the Golden Medal; he was also member of the Paris Diplomatic Academy, the Institute of Sciences of Rome and Tirana.

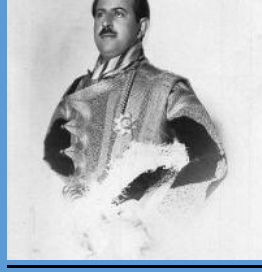
### **FUAD ASLLANI (1933 – 1934 – 1935)**

**Fuad Asllani** (1897-1981) served as Chargé d’Affairs in London during 1933- 1934 and as Minister Plenipotentiary from December 1934 - October 1935. He was born in Beyrouth, Lebanon, studied at the famous “ Roberts College” in Istanbul and graduated in 1923 in Vienna. Fuad Asllani was member of the leftist Association “*Bashkim*”, whose leadership he took after its leader, Avni Rustemi’s assassination. He also joined KONARE led by Fan Noli. Although he was an open opponent of King Zogu, later they made peace between them. After an internment in Delvina in 1928, King Zog offered him a job in the Foreign Ministry. Then, he served in albanian diplomatic representatinos abroad - Bulgaria, Great Britain (1932–1934) and in the League of Nations in Geneve. For some time, he was also MP and Director of “ Herbert” Institute. During the nazi occupation, he was member of the State Council and for some time in 1944 he stayed hidden. Then, the communist regime arrested and punished him together with 36 other intellectuals, including Musine Kokalari. He spent his remaining years until his death in prison and internment.

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<sup>1</sup>Ekrem bej Vlora – Contributions to the History of Turkish Rule in Albania – unpublished work.

## **XHEMIL DINO (1932 – 1933)**



**Xhemil Dino** (1894-1972) served as Minister Plenipotentiary in Great Britain from March 1932 – February 1933.<sup>2</sup> He was born in 1894 in Prevezë, in the Prefecture of Ionanina in a branch of the noble family “ Dino” He studied at the University of Galatasaray in Istanbul and following the proclamation of independence in Albania was elected MP from Dibra constituency. He represented Albania in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the League of Nations from 1925–1927.

## **RAUF FICO**



Rauf Fico, (1881–1994) – diplomat and politician was born in Gjirokastra; he studied in Vienna and then in Mekteb-i Mülkiye<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Archives in the Foreign Ministry, Tiranë

<sup>3</sup>Mekteb-i Mülkiye -Faculty of Political Sciences at the State University in Ankara.



In 1912 he was hired by Vlora Government as advisor in the Ministry of Interior. In 1916, under the Austrian military administration he served as Vice Governor of Tirana. In that capacity he became co-founder of the « Shelter for Orphans »( Streha Vorfnore) the first orphanage ever in Albania. In 1921, he became Minister of Interior in the cabinet of Prime Minister, Pandeli Vangjeli. During 1923-1925, he was MP from Durrës district.

By the end of '20, he served as Albania's ambassador in Turkey and in Bulgaria, whereas in April 1929 he became Foreign Minister. However, this did not last for long, since he was against italians and their influence in Albania. Thus, he was sent as Ambassador in Yugoslavia (1933-1936), Greece, in 1937 and in Germany in 1938-1939. Then, he was arrested by the italians and was interned in Italy. He passed away in Tirana on 23 January 1944, only a few months after Italy's surrender and his return home. He holds a large number of awards and orders ; the most notable among them are « Order of Grand Cordon of Franz Jozeph, Leopold, the Crown of Romania, Italy, Luxembourg, Foenix of Greece, Order of Skanderbej, the French Legion of Honour, the Palm from the French Academy, the Order of Boris from Bulgaria and Doctor Honoris Causa from the Academy of Naples.

### **QATIN SARAÇI (1903 – 1974)**



**Qatin Saraçi**, (1903-1974) served as Chargé d’Affairs from October 1935 - December 1935. He was born in a well-known family in Shkodra and became a public diplomat and a well-known painter. Like Eqrem Bej Vlora, he studied at the Secondary School “Theresianum” in Vienna with an Austrian fellowship. He met and very soon forged friendship with Ahmet Zogu, helping him later to ascend to power. Zogu promoted his diplomatic career, appointing him as General Consul in Vienna and after the “Anschluss” as Chargé d’Affairs in London. In 1948 he exhibited many of his paintings in London. He was a friend of the famous Austrian painter Oscar Kokoschka (1886-1980) whom he helped during the emigration years in Great Britain. Saraçi has travelled all over Europe and has also published a book dedicated to Zogu entitled “*Inside the Story*”.



During the period 1938 - 1939, the Albanian Embassy was located at this building, 71 Pont Street London SW

## LEC KURTI (1935 – 1939)



The building above hosted the staff of the Embassy in London during 1936-1938, Egerton Gardens, South Kensington, London SW3.

**Lec Kurti** (1884-1948) was Minister Plenipotentiary in London from December 1935 - April 1939. He is a multi-dimensional personality with an immense contribution in many fields of albanian political, diplomatic and musical life. He was the son of the famous composer Palokë Kurti from Shkodra. Lec Kurti studied at the Lyceum of Pesaro near Urbano and then in the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice.

Afterwards, he studied political sciences in Rome and served as Albania's diplomatic representative to the League of Nations in Geneva. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in his house and most of his musical pieces were burned. From the remaining manuscripts it appears that Lec Kurti composed music during the period 1908-1916; in the later periods, he devoted himself to diplomacy and then to politics.

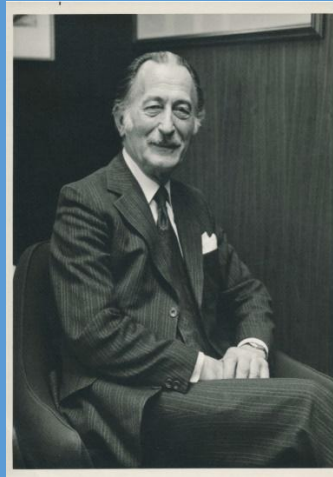
Lec Kurti commenced his activity in the albanian diplomacy in 1918 in Bari as Consul (1921-1922) and then "Chargé d'Affairs" (1925-1926) in Athens, where he became "Citizen of Honour"

Then, he was representative to the League of Nations in Geneva (1930-1935) and Minister Plenipotentiary in London. He showed great courage when he did not hand over the Embassy in London to the Italian representative. The British press of that time showed him at the Foreign Office in London, declaring his resignation and refusing to recognize Albania's occupation by fascist Italy on the 7th of April 1939. During WWII, Lek Kurti became Vice Chairman of the political Party "Balli Kombëtar (National Front) and a few days ahead of the country's liberation on 29 November 1944, he left Albania for ever and died in exile in 1948.



Diplomat Lek Kurti on the pages of the British daily newspapers on the day when he offered his resignation to the British Foreign Office, as a sign of non-conciliation with Albania's fascist occupation by Italy.

## **DERVISH DUMA (1939 - 1999)**



**Dervish Duma**<sup>4</sup> lived 90 years and was one of the few pre-war diplomats who remained for over 60 years an outstanding servant of the Albanian people, as a diplomatic representative, as speaker of radiophonic broadcasts during WWII and unofficial leader of the community of albanians who went to exile in Great Britain. He was born in Borsh, district of Saranda in 1908. After the proclamation of Independence, in 1913, Borsh was stormed by the greeks and the villagers there left for different other places. Family Duma settled in Vlora. Dervish entered an Italian school. In 1920, he moved to the American Technical School in Tirana. During that time, very few pupils could speak English as he did. So, at 20, he was appointed Secretary General of the Albanian Gendarmery under the British Command. Its Commandant, Major Sir Jocelyn Percy acknowledged Duma's capacities and helped him go and study for public administration at the famous London School of Economics in London from 1933 -1935.

Upon his return to Albania, Duma joined the diplomatic service and was entrusted with a double - fold task : First Secretary of the Albanian delegation to the League of Nations in Geneve and Second Secretary of the Legate in London. In early 1939 he

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<sup>4</sup>*The Independent*, 14 May 1998



became Chargé d’Affairs there. When on 7 April 1939 Mussolini ordered Albania’s invasion, Duma was called to return to Tirana.<sup>5</sup> But he decided to stay in London instead and worked for “Bowater” company; from there he helped a great deal to maintain and promote relations with American publishers.

In 1940 he founded the Albanian section at BBC. Thus, he became the spokesman of hope for Albania. During the years in exile of King Zogu, he helped him and his family also with his English. He kept the connections with the Albanian emigration in Great Britain. Meanwhile, he served for 62 years as an active leader of the Anglo - Albanian Association.

After the fall of communism he enjoyed a new life. First, the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, the late Pjetër Arbënor and then the President of Kosovo, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova visited him in London after the ‘90. He became Honorary Consul and was invited to re-open the Albanian service at BBC, which was closed down by Wilson Government just to save 12 000 pounds. Dervish Duma has left written poetry in English and in Albanian. He was acknowledged as a brilliant communicator in both these languages.

## **RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN ALBANIA AND GREAT BRITAIN**

### **Albania’s Ambassadors in London 1992 - 2015**

The diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established thanks to the major political changes following the fall of Berlin Wall and a year later the end of the communist dictatorship in Albania. This marked also the end of the “cursed

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<sup>5</sup> Dervish Duma did not hand over the keys of the Albanian Embassy to the representatives of the Italian occupiers. He kept and left them to his very active son, Aleksander, both as a testament and as a relic in memory of that brutal interruption of the Albanian state activity.

west” implying mainly “ British - American west; even a book was written by the dictator “ The Anglo- American threat for Albania” which makes us all red with shame. The diplomatic relations had a fresh reset on 29 May 1991, with the Joint Stament issued by the governments of both coutries<sup>6</sup>; it closed up for ever a dark chapter in the relations between us and Albania’s two most friendly states - USA and Great Britain. At first, the UK covered Albania from Rome, whereas in London it was active Alexander, the son of the last albanian diplomat of the Kingdom, Dervish Duma. Alexander acted as Albania’s “ Special Envoy to the UK”. In its first year, the Embassy seat was in Mr. Duma’s house. A year after, the Albanain state decided to be represented in the UK by an albanian intelectual, known for his contribution to English profficiency and namely Mr. Pavli Qesku.

### **PAVLI QESKU (1993-1997)**



The renowned philologist Pavli Qesku was appointed in London on 14 April 1993 where he presented the Letters of Credence to Her Majesty, Queen Elisabeth II, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

He was born on 16 June 1943 and graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Tirana in 1968. He worked as translator in

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<sup>6</sup>Archives in the Foreign Ministry: the dossier of relations with Great Britain

the Publishing House “Naim Frashëri” in Tirana from 1968 until 1973. After an experience as teacher in the town of Peshkopia, he returned to his job as translator and editor in the Publishing House “8 Nëntori” – later on to become “The Enciclopedic Publishing House” (1976-1992).

In April 1992 he started work in the Foreign Ministry in Tirana until 1993. He served as Ambassador in London from 1993 - 1997. There were a series of agreements signed during that period between the two countries. Pavli Qesku is a well-known translator and author of the largest albanian - English dictionary of 130.000 words.

### **AGIM FAGU (1997-2002)**



**Agim Fagu** served as Ambassador in London from November 1997 - October 2002. He was born in 1948 from a well-known family in Tirana and is a graduate of the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Tirana. He is acknowledged as the best basketball player at all times in the ‘70.

After his short experience as a teacher, as of 1978 he worked for a decade as expert in an import state foreign trade organization. By the end of ‘80 he was posted as Economic Counsellor in the Embassy in Athens.

In June 1997 he became MP and in November he reported in London as Ambassador. This period coincided with major political developments in Albania, Great Britain, Europe and in the USA - the 11 September 2001 in USA, the break - out of the armed

conflict in Kosovo, the start of the Stabilization and Association Process with the Balkans, the armed uprising in Macedonia and others where the UK had a pivotal role. Accordingly, his performance at the head of the Albanian Embassy, especially in relation to Kosovo were highly appreciated.

From 2002 until he retired a few years ago, Mr. Fagu was the longest serving director of the NATO Department in the Foreign Ministry for over a decade. For a few years he was also President of the National Olympic Committee.

The President of the Republic, Mr. Ilir Meta has awarded him lately with the highest title “Grand Master”

He is also co-founder and member of the Managing Board of the Council of Albanian Ambassadors.

### **KASTRIOT ROBO (2002-2007)**



**Kastriot Robo** was born on 30 July 1960 in Lushnje. He served as Ambassador in the UK from October 2002 until July 2007.

He was graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences and then followed the post-university studies for Foreign Policy and International Relations at Tirana University.

He began the diplomatic career in 1986 as Chief of Section in the Directorate of Neighbouring Countries in the Foreign Ministry until 1989. Afterwards, he worked in the cabinet of the Foreign

Minister; then as First Secretary in the Embassy in Athens (1991-1994) in Sofia and in opening the Embassy in Tokyo (1995-1996). After a period of service as Director of Regional Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, he served as Ambassador in Athens, in London, in Madrid, Denmark and a few months ago in Ankara.

The period of his service in London is well remembered for the intensification of the relations with the UK. He has done a praise - worthy job with the albanian-anglo community. In appreciation of this performance, he was awarded the title "*Freeman of the City of London*".

### **ZEF MAZI (2007 – 2011)**



**Zef Mazi** was Ambassador in London and Ireland from 2007-2011. Before that he served for two terms as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to OSCE, UN, IAEA and other international organizations in Vienna ( 1993 - 1997 and 2002 - 2007) In 2004 he was candidate for the Office of Secretary General of OECE. From 1991 - 1992 he served as Minister Counsellor and Chargé d’Affairs in the Embassy in Vienna and as non-resident in Switzerland. During 1989 - 1991 he was



expert in the Multilateral Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From 1978- 1986 he worked as translator and editor in the Publishing House “8 Nëntori”. He has also worked in the Foreign Service of Radio Tirana(1975-1985). As of March 2011, Zef Mazi is Special assistant to the IAEA Director General. In May 2020 he was appointed Albania’s Chief Negotiator for accession talks with the EU.

**Mrs. TEUTA STAROVA (2008-2012)**  
**(Chargé d’Affairs)**

**Dr. Teuta Starova** graduated from Tirana University for Philosophy in 1985; she attended the post-university studies there (1986-1990) and in “*Central European University*” ( CEU ) in Prague. Before serving as diplomat, she was professor in the Department of History&Philology of the Faculty of Law&Political Sciences, Department of Philosophy& Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tirana University.

Dr. Starova served in London as Minister Counsellor from 2008–2013; whereas from March 2011 - February 2012 she was Chargé d’ Affairs. Afterwards, she returned to her professor’s activity at Tirana University.

**MAL BERISHA (2012- 2015)**





Mr. Berisha was born in 1952 in Tropoja. He finished the secondary school in the gymnasium “*Ismail Qemali*” in the town of Laç, Kurbin District and is a graduate of the High Institute of Fine Arts for Culture. He has also studied in the diplomatic school at the University of Hacetepe in Ankara.

He was engaged for a long time with cultural and artistic events in Kruja district and has published several articles on the cultural - ethnographic heritage of that district.

He joined the diplomatic service in 1992, as desk officer in the Regional Department at the Foreign Ministry; then, from 1993 - 1997 he was posted in the Consulate General in Istanbul.

During 1998 – 2000 he joined the efforts of albanians in USA under the emblematic “Albanian - American Civic League” and the Pan-Albanian Federation “Vatra” in USA for the cause of Kosovo.

In 2000, he became part of the international staff of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

In 2009 he returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana where he served until 2012 as Director for Consular and then Regional Affairs.

On 17 February he was appointed as Chargé d’Affairs in the UK, Northern Ireland and Ireland (non-resident). On 27 June 2013, he presented the Letters of Credence to Her Majesty, Queen Elisabeth II, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and on 10 October 2013 to the President of Northern Ireland, Michael D. Higgins.

He has combined his diplomatic activity with scientific researches and the publication of six books on the history of relations with the anglo-saxon world. His heritage in the Embassy in London is closely connected with crafting a very high cultural profile of the Embassy, aimed at promoting the best values and traditions of our country and nation. Mention-worthy in this respect is his initiative to erect the bust of Skënderbeu in Bayswater and the organization of 145 promotion events as: Editions “*Notes On Albania*” and “The Albanian - British Cultural Week”.

Mr. Beisha holds the title “Chevalier of the Order of Skënderbej” awarded by the President of the Republic, Mr. Bujar Nishani, the title “*Commendatore*” of Royal Order Francis I and the relevant medal. They honour individuals with special public, scientific, cultural and artistic merits, regardless of their religious or national belonging. He is member of the Council of Albanian Ambassadors.



The diplomatic staff of the Embassy on the day of the presentation of the Letters of Credence on 27 June 2013.

Translated in English by Dr. Jorgji Kote, Co-founder of the Albanian Ambassador's Council